

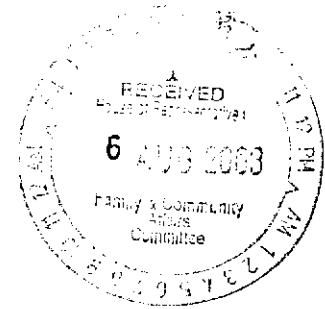
Submission No: 349

Date Received: 6-8-03

Secretary: [REDACTED]

Submission to the inquiry

August 3, 2003



Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am male, 44 years old, have 2 children {a boy aged 5 and a girl aged 3}, provide financially for my family by means of running my own small business and have been separated from my family for approximately six months. My wife {Aged 43 years} felt that she needed to change her life, and unfortunately for me that meant my eviction. My wife asked me to move out for one week so she could think about our relationship. I never knew at the time that her solicitor instructed her to get me out of the house by what ever means necessary. We never fought nor even for that matter argued at all. I hold no malice toward my wife and wish her all the best for her future. In my submission I intend to show cause why I believe in the concept of Shared Parenting.

I was present at the birth of both my children's births. Breast feeding was not possible so I shared the midnight bottle feeds with my wife. I regularly bathed, fed, played with, dressed and educated both my children. My wife and I both agreed that I was to remain the 'bread winner' and she was to stay at home with our babies. I restructured my working hours so that I could be at home between 4.00 – 4.30 pm weekdays, as well as removing myself from all weekend work to be at home with my family. Now, I find myself in crisis as my wife has all control of when I can and cannot see my children. I was barely coping with the isolation when my wife dropped the bombshell that if the financial arrangements are not to her favor she would take the children 2 ½ hours away from me to her parents home. I currently have restructured my work to allow me every Wednesday night and every second Friday and Saturday nights to be with my children. This threat she makes would reduce me to only every second Saturday night access. I went to my family doctor who thankfully prescribed anti depressants. I thought of ending my life as I could see no happiness in a future where my children would gradually disappear from my life. I am now being counseled by professional people and I am now focused on my battle to seek 50/50 shared parenting.

The current system is biased toward women and I am very much the underdog in the battle that befronts me. The legal fraternity judges and convicts the non custodial father before he has an opportunity to be heard. I find that my own solicitor is unwilling to support my wishes as he feels it is a lost cause to even try. I have had to educate myself as much as I can in family law. I have attended parenting sessions where I have met many separated fathers whom share my same fears and experiences. Nearly all of these men that I met had suicide as one option to escape the pain of losing their children. Thankfully these men chose to be positive and constructive as I have because our

.....

August 3, 2003

Page 2

children NEED our love and guidance. It's easy from my perspective to see why many good fathers commit suicide over these issues.

In my case, I believe that if shared parenting was in place my wife would have sought relationship counseling before seeking legal counseling from a solicitor (She saw a solicitor some months before I even knew that she wanted to separate). We may have still separated, however it would have been a separation with honesty, dignity and not driven by greed. It was easier for my wife to make this decision to separate as there is no perceived 'down side' for her. She constantly reminds me of her power base by threatening me with removing the children. I of course behave. If shared parenting was in place it would stop this happening. The current system turns good people into bad people as it is totally encouraged by solicitors to be adversarial. I was to move back into the family home in another room so as to ease the trauma that my children were experiencing; however my wife sought legal counsel and decided to continue my eviction. I ask you is this in the best interest of the children?

In summary, I believe that shared parenting is in the best interest of the children for these following reasons;

- 1] Children equally need both a mother and a father. There are numerous papers written by respected leading child psychiatrists verifying this.
- 2] The children would no longer be used as a weapon between warring parents.
- 3] Parents would be made by law to behave with integrity and honesty with a genuine ideology of what is in the best interest of the children..
- 4] Suicide rates for men involved in family law crisis would reduce.
- 5] Relationship breakdowns would reduce.
- 6] It would enable more opportunity for mothers to return to work if they wish.
- 7] If there is proven evidence of abuse by one of the parents, the system would still weed out the bad eggs and not allow custody for the offending parent.
- 8] Less litigation and more mediation would occur.